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ABSTRACT

Play for Peace (PFP) is an international initiative bringing together children, youth, and organizations from communities in conflict, using cooperative play to create compassion and peace between cultures that have a history of conflict. A 2-year study examined PFP's history and methodology and conducted a program assessment. Data were gathered via document reviews and telephone and internet interviews with program representatives and youth facilitators at sites in Guatemala, India, the Middle East, and South Africa. Since its formation in 1995, 30,000 children in seven regions around the globe have participated in PFP initiatives. Ten community organizations with histories of conflict have joined together, and 550 youth facilitators have been trained. PFP representatives engage leaders from major area institutions, especially those in conflict, in educational experiences including cooperative play. Animosities lessen as bridges of trust develop. Once these leaders understand the power of play, they recruit and help train members of local community organizations. Organizational participants become adult coordinators and recruit teenagers into the process. Youth leaders learn to facilitate cooperative play encounters and identify young children aged 6-10 to participate. Activities encourage laughter, compassion, and personal connection at a time when, developmentally, the young children are forming a sense of self, awareness of others, and basic ideas about interactions with people they perceive as different. Brief assessment results are given in areas of needs assessment, program design, data collection, consultative reporting, publication and presentation materials, and future research needs. (TD)

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Voices Of Peace: A Chronology of the Play For Peace Methodology

An Experiential Community Development Training Model

By, Joan Leafman, Northeastern Illinois University

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Abstract

Voices of Peace chronicled the implementation of an experiential community development and training model created and utilized by Play for Peace, an international peace initiative, in communities of conflict around the world. A multi-year documentation process provided a history of the Play For Peace movement, a description of the methodology used by Play for Peace to accomplish its mission of bringing together children, youth and organizations from communities in conflict and a summary of results of an assessment and evaluation project conducted by researchers in the field of experiential education, to determine the efficacy of the Play for Peace model for enhancing peace through play. Included also is a review of anecdotal comments and stories on the progress and promise from key stakeholders in Play for Peace initiatives, of how this unique model for community development and leadership training is actually affecting cultural change in key areas of conflict.

Introduction

Throughout the world there are "hot spots" where ethnic and cultural hostilities have erupted into armed conflicts in at least 41 areas on five continents, resulting in violence and displacement. These "hot spots" regularly experience escalation rather than resolve. Most armed conflicts that spiraled into serious warfare have involved longstanding ethnic or cultural disputes rather than the outbreak of a new conflict. This creates separatism where serious armed conflicts involved escalations in attempts by

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distinct ethnic groups to gain or maintain separation. As a result there continues to be growing numbers of displaced people. The increase in people who are forcibly displaced spawns armed conflicts, ripping apart many of the world's most economically disadvantaged countries. (Source: U.S. Committee for Refugees) A cycle of conflict is perpetuated, amplified and passed down through generations.

This investigation chronicled the implementation of an experiential community development and training model created and utilized by Play for Peace, an international peace initiative, in communities of conflict around the world. A multi-year documentation process provided a history of the Play For Peace movement, a description of the methodology used by Play for Peace to accomplish its mission of bringing together children, youth and organizations from communities in conflict and a summary of results of an assessment and evaluation project conducted by researchers in the field of experiential education, to determine the efficacy of the Play for Peace model for enhancing peace through play. Included also is a review of anecdotal comments and stories on the progress and promise from key stakeholders in Play for Peace initiatives, of how this unique model for community development and leadership training is actually affecting cultural change in key areas of conflict.

Methods

The original intent of this investigation was to conduct a two-year longitudinal study to research and report on the; Play for Peace history and methodology, results of academic research measuring the impact of PFP, and in-depth examination of the PFP model in different regions and at different stages of development. This was to occur through two-week visits to 6 international regions to include interviews conducted with

key stakeholders in the regions. The result of which would be a compilation of stories captured during interviews that tell the story of Play for Peace and its work. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, the two most prominent of which were the elimination of promised funding and unusually unstable world conditions, the data collection process required adjustment. Instead of an on-site longitudinal study, a virtual investigation was conducted. Information was gathered from existing documentation as well as interviews with lead representatives; on-site representatives and youth facilitators from six Play for Peace initiatives conducted via phone and Internet. All participants understood the reason for the interview and agreed to take part. The six areas included in the study were Guatemala, Northern Ireland, South Caucasus, Middle East, South Africa and India. Existing documentation included annual reports, independent international media coverage, background papers and status reports given to the Board of Directors. Interviews, which were audio taped to ensure analysis and translation accuracy, included ten open ended questions that focused on each individual's introduction, understanding of, ongoing involvement and future plans with the Play for Peace organization.

Results

Play for Peace was created in 1995 by two veteran experiential educators in the corporate and therapeutic training fields. In their shared vision to create realistic hope in the face on an increasingly violent world, the two co-founders launched Play for Peace initiatives simultaneously in Chicago and the Middle East under the aegis of the Association for Experiential Education. To date 30,000 children worldwide have participated in Play for Peace initiatives. In the year 2002 there were 40,000 participant

days in seven regions around the globe. Five hundred and fifty teenagers were trained as youth facilitators. Ten community-based organizations, with histories of conflict that had never previously been linked, joined together in a united effort. Play for Peace is an independent; 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization based in the U.S. with locally initiated program sites in the Middle East, Guatemala, Northern Ireland, South Caucasus, India, Canada, the U.S. and South Africa.

Play for Peace, Guatemala began in 1997. The goal was to successfully bring together indigenous tribes, the *Indios* and *Ladino* peoples. The program currently includes 12 different communities, including two returned-refugee communities, several rural communities and a program in Guatemala City. Unique to Guatemala, is a youth board of directors or junta directiva. The junta directiva provides community leaders, elders, and youth with a forum to self-govern and mentor the Youth Facilitators.

Hyderabad is the capital of the state of Andhra Pradesh located in Southern India. Play for Peace went to Hyderabad because, over the last decade, this area has suffered the brunt of communal rioting between Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities. Alliances have been built with COVA in Hyderabad, MAYA and The Christel House School in Bangalore, and Navjeet Community Health Centre in Mumbai. These partner organizations see Play for Peace as a tool to ease community tensions and give children something to laugh about. The institutions linked through this work agree that they would never have collaborated with a common goal without Play for Peace.

Play for Peace was launched in the Middle East in November 1996. The pilot initiative took place in the lower Galilee. The first activity trained ten Jewish and Arab

Youth Facilitators over two days. They then facilitated a cooperative play session for more than 120 young children from Arab villages and Jewish settlements in the area. By February of 1997, the program had expanded with the collaboration of The Palestinian Center for Rapprochement Between People and its Jerusalem counterpart, The Rapprochement Dialogue Center, The Telem Reform Youth Movement, and the YMCA Young Leadership Program. With support from The Jerusalem Foundation, 40 teenagers from these organizations participated in a three-day facilitator learning session in West Jerusalem. In 1997 these Youth Facilitators introduced cooperative, non-competitive play to Palestinian, Israeli, Israeli Arab and Druse children. Over the past five years Play for Peace Middle East has trained more than 230 Youth Facilitators and served 1,700 elementary school-age children.

Play for Peace began its exploratory process in South Africa in 1997. Over the next two years a series of train-the-trainer workshops and play sessions expanded the network throughout Cape Town and Johannesburg. The initial local partner was the RALI initiative, a multicultural youth leadership program. Play for Peace South Africa's activity currently centers in the Gauteng province, working in concert with the King Luthuli Transformation Center. Play for Peace South Africa works with the African communities of Kagiso, Soweto and the White communities. As of spring 2003, seventy play sessions have engaged more than 4,000 children. Also trained were 40 Youth Facilitators and six Adult Coordinators.

Consistent, reliable Information from Northern Ireland and the South Caucasus was unobtainable.

The definition of Play for Peace is a description of a global network of organizations and people that participate in a process, that creates peace among communities in conflict. Evidence exists to confirm this claim. There are annual global summits that include selected leaders from all levels and areas of the Play for Peace community. Shared at these summits are regional reports, new innovations in experiential education, stories of successes and failures, as well as professional training and development. In addition there are exchange programs among the initiatives that include field representatives, local organization coordinators and youth facilitators. In addition, a global resource center, based in Chicago, exists and actively assists the regions on a regular basis. Finally, there is ongoing Internet communication among the regions that is both informative and supportive.

The Play for Peace mission, "to bring together children, youth and organizations from communities in conflict, using cooperative play to create laughter, compassion and peace" is well articulated. Every respondent, in every interview, was aware of and embraced the mission. In addition every piece of literature disseminated by Play for Peace has the mission prominently integrated into the work. Finally, in reviewing the Play for Peace Internet listserv greater than 90% of all discussions were centered on never forgetting and further promoting the organization's mission.

The PFP vision, to ignite Play for Peace learning initiatives in regions around the globe, networking as one unified community that contributes to a more peaceful world, is less prominent. This vision was not evident in the literature. It was not addressed in the minutes of the annual summits. The organization's listserv did not often include the

vision in its discussions. Upon being asked of Play for Peace's vision, interviewees were either unable to answer the question or confused it with the mission.

Ongoing evaluation and assessment of the Play for Peace Methodology - An Experiential Community Development Training Model has been initiated to fulfill two major goals: 1. To identify the extent to which Play for Peace as an organization, and in each of the regions, is fulfilling the overall mission of enhancing peace through play. 2. To identify and recommend possible areas for improvement in the quality of program processes and outcomes. A committee consisting of four leading researchers and evaluators in the field of experiential education, a Play for Peace Board of Director, and the CEO of PFP serve on the evaluation committee. The program evaluation project coordinators are responsible for guiding and managing all ongoing evaluation and assessment efforts. Typically, program evaluation rotates through six phases: 1. Needs Assessment, which includes program evaluation, needs assessment with the Play For Peace central administration. Program evaluation needs assessment with each Play For Peace region. Identification of evaluation resources within each region and written reports on identified program evaluation needs to be disseminated. 2: Program evaluation design, which includes identification of appropriate literature and possible research tools from broader literature (e.g., peace psychology, outdoor and experiential education, etc.). Work with Play For Peace on co-developing appropriate evaluation tools and creation of a flexible, rigorous design, which can be implemented across regions. Written reports detailing the program evaluation design and material. 3. Data collection, which includes training of regional evaluators and regional representatives as appropriate for collection of data, entry of data and analysis of data. 4: Consultative

reporting, consisting of initial results shared with Play For Peace, with feedback and interpretation of the results. Initial drafts reports then disseminated to Play For Peace regions and consultative feedback sought. Penultimate reports written and distributed to each region, requesting feedback. Penultimate overall report is then written and shared with Play For Peace central administration, requesting feedback. 5: Publication and presentation materials prepared as appropriate. 6: Future research evaluation to include future needs for Play For Peace research evaluation and assessments.

Charts

"Hub" Organization(s) oversee the implementation of Play for Peace within a specific territory.
Local Community-based Organizations Serve as Play for Peace Partners for the Long Term Implementation of Initiatives
Adult Coordinators Support Logistical Needs of Teenage Facilitators
Youth Facilitators from Communities in Conflict Facilitate Co-operative Play for Children
Children from Communities in Conflict Build Relationships Through Co-operative Play

Chart 1

Play For Peace Global Learning Community

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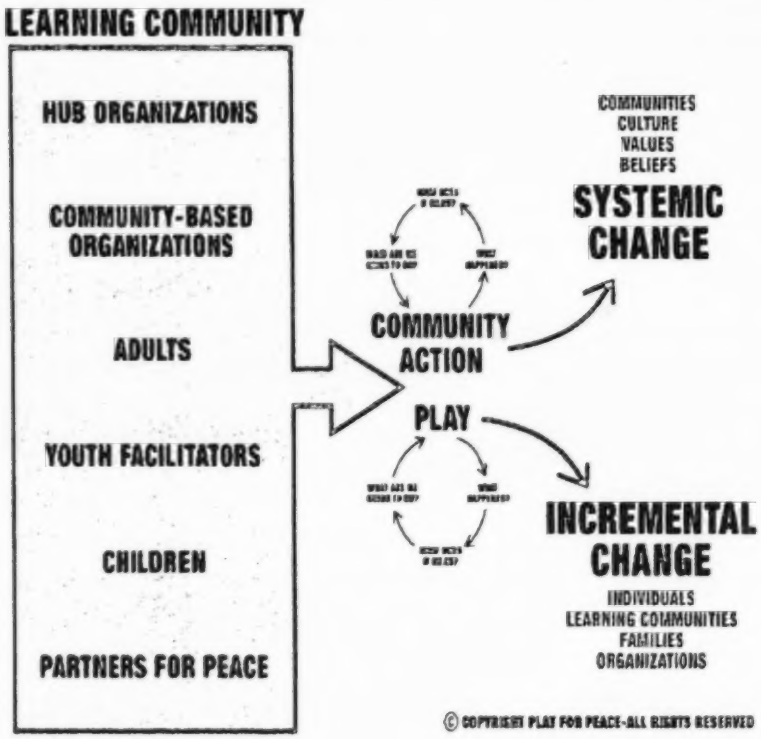

Chart 2

Play For Peace Process

Discussion

Play for Peace is an international initiative bringing together children, youth, and organizations from communities in conflict, using cooperative play to create laughter, compassion and peace. By bringing together people with diverse and historically incompatible backgrounds, values and beliefs through the seemingly simple act of play, seeds of compassion are sown for a more peaceful today and tomorrow.

Play for Peace creates value at a number of levels, and that value radiates throughout the larger community. As evidenced in Chart 1, the partner organizations increase their organizational capacity, gain new tools and skills that can be implemented in their other programs, and create links to other communities. The youth

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become leaders and role models for intercultural peacemaking. The children have the opportunity to play with their peers from other communities, form new friendships, and, most importantly, to break down generations of barriers between them before they harden into fear, hatred, and violence. Play is the key.

Play for Peace's model for change (Chart 2) encourages community stakeholders around the world to elevate their own peacemaking potential by linking together the various assets of their communities. Guided by professional Play for Peace representatives, local community leaders from major institutions - particularly those in conflict - gather in response to a regional call to action. The representatives engage them in educational experiences including cooperative, non-competitive play, demonstrating the Play for Peace technique. Community leaders begin to generate a safe climate in which to work together. Animosities gradually lessen as bridges of trust develop. Following the carefully facilitated team-building experiences, participants reflect on their encounter. Once they understand the power of play, they begin to collaborate on a plan of action to bring together diverse elements of their communities, using play as a catalyst.

As they plan, the leaders identify members of local organizations who might wish to participate in the Play for Peace model. Play for Peace representatives guide the evolution of the new learning community, encouraging people from the local organizations, who may have previously considered collaborating unthinkable; to plan the ways they will be able to work together. Once they have experienced the Play for Peace community- building activities, the participants from partner organizations

become Adult Coordinators, forming strategies at the local level to recruit young people, most often teenagers 16-20, into the process.

With guidance from the Play for Peace representatives and the Adult Coordinators, the culturally diverse youth leaders learn how to facilitate the Play for Peace cooperative play encounters, and become, themselves, advocates for peace. As they continue to participate in the emerging learning community the youth gain crucial skills in group facilitation, conflict resolution, and leadership, to become Youth Facilitators.

The Youth Facilitators help to identify young children aged 6-10 to participate in cooperative play sessions involving teamwork, collaboration, and non-competitive games among teens and children from communities at odds. These activities encourage laughter, compassion and personal connection at a time when, developmentally, the young children are forming a sense of self, awareness of others and basic ideas about interactions with people they perceive as different. The catalyst of play enables people of all ages to connect to each other, and to generate other strategies for rebuilding their communities. The Play for Peace model facilitates this process.

Play for Peace implements its programs through fostering partnerships with local community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, or other trusted community "host institutions" including schools, faith-based groups, youth clubs, community centers, and other organizations. Play for Peace builds capacity in its partner organizations, and works with them to train their youth participants, enabling them to bring Play for Peace to their communities. Through this approach, their reach is

maximized, local ownership and sustainability is ensured, and there is delivery of programs in a scalable and cost-effective manner.

At every level of its program structure, Play for Peace seeks to add value to its participants – from our partner organizations, to the youth that participate, to the children who are our ultimate beneficiaries. The ultimate goal of Play for Peace is to create compassion between cultures that have a history of conflict by breaking the cycle of violence. It is the youth who will either continue or break that cycle of generations of violence. Through the friendships they form, they "unlearn" their taught prejudices, build compassion, and find constructive ways of managing conflict as they grow into adulthood and become the community leaders of tomorrow. Play for Peace subtly but systematically develops emotional maturity, integrity, responsibility, compassion, interpersonal communication skills, and understanding and tolerance for individual difference – all essential skills to participate productively in a democracy and in the workplace. Equally significant, Play for Peace develops concrete action through the cultures working together over time to build a sustainable, peaceful community.

Play for Peace's unique initiative has attracted a wide range of prominent supporters including Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and Brother Wayne Teasdale, of the Council for a Parliament of the World Religions, both of whom are members of the Play For Peace advisory council. His Holiness, The Dalai Lama, is also an active supporter of Play for Peace.

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